



# TOWN OF BERWYN HEIGHTS

Prince George's County, Maryland

Incorporated in 1896 ~ Sixth Oldest Municipality in PG County

## TOWN MEETING MINUTES

JUNE 11, 2014

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Calvo, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Kulpa-Eddy, CMs Dennison, Rasmussen and Schreiber. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Murphy, Chief of Police Antolik, Treasurer Lape, Clerk Harper, ATHA Director Aaron Marcavitch and citizens.

Mayor Calvo led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### 1. FLASH FLOOD REPORT

Mayor Calvo gave a report on the June 10 flash flood that caused considerable damage to homes in low lying areas. He said that Town Councilmembers were at the Maryland Municipal League (MML) Conference in Ocean City when the storm hit. But the response to the flooding from the Town's staff, Volunteer Fire Department, Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness was very good, as was the initial response from the County. The Town is still gathering information about what caused the flooding and which homes were affected most. It appears that this storm simply produced too much rain for the storm drains to handle and back up, especially in low areas where water tends to accumulate. The worst flooding occurred on the 8900 block of 59th Avenue, the 8500 block of 58th Avenue and on B Road at 57th Avenue, but it also included many back door stair wells elsewhere.

Yesterday, after the storm, County staff went door to door to make an assessment of whether a home was fit for habitation and/or needed to have the electricity gas turned off. Approximately twenty four homes were designated as unfit and the residents asked to stay elsewhere. The Town Center was opened as an emergency shelter, and the County set up a shelter in College Park. Everyone who needed an emergency shelter was served.

The Council decided to add bulk trash collection runs for the remainder of the week and waived permits for dumpsters and PODs to facilitate cleanup. Further, the plans to purchase a pump to be able to help residents that need to pump out their basement, and the Town office continues to act as a clearinghouse for information about assistance. Anyone needing help is encouraged to contact the Town office.

Mayor Calvo said that he focused his effort on improving coordination with and amongst County agencies to get homes that had electricity and/or gas turned disconnected. The County's Department of Permits, Inspections and Enforcement (DPIE) is responsible for inspecting homes and clearing it for reconnection of gas. The Town will post information about the process for getting reconnected tomorrow. He is also trying to clarify whether insurance will pay for flood damage if property is not in a flood plain, and to understand why the storm drain system failed.

Mayor Calvo concluded by commending residents for their resilience and for the help offered by neighbors not directly affected by the flooding. The most urgent need, however, is for financial resources rather than clothing or household items. The Town will set up a flood assistance fund where residents can make a financial contribution.

In response to Mike Attick, Mayor Calvo said that he does not believe that the Town has any recourse with the County in getting restitution if storm drains prove have been the culprit for the flooding. Mr. Attick also commented about the need to get a permit before turning power back on and about bulk trash likely needed be picked up for several weeks as people wait to have insurance agents assess the damage and basements are repaired.

### 2. ATHA PRESENTATION

Mayor Calvo welcomed Aaron Marcavitch, Executive Director of the Anacostia Trails Heritage Area (ATHA). Mr. Marcavitch explained that ATHA is one of 12 regional tourism organizations in Maryland that focuses on the Route 1 corridor and northern Prince George's County. ATHA promotes history, art and culture, and for the years has been busy organizing events celebrating the bi-centennial of the War of 1812. The capstone of this series of events is the Undaunted Weekend taking place August 23-24 at the Bladensburg waterfront. There will be a bevy of family activities, from re-enactments and demonstrations to children's games and fire works. Details about this and other Prince George's commemorative events can be found at <http://www.princegeorges1812.org>.

Mr. Marcavitch said that ATHA will next focus on bicycle tourism. The last segments of the Anacostia River trail have been completed, allowing riders to bike from Berwyn Heights all the way to downtown Washington. With the new additions, the D.C. area is about to become one of the largest urban trail systems in the country. The Indian Creek trail in Berwyn Heights is part of the Anacostia trails, and the Town earlier this year applied for a \$20,000 grant to improve bike infrastructure with repair stations, bike racks and bike lanes. The grant application received favorable review by the Maryland Heritage Association with final word to be issued July 7. Berwyn Heights is one of the keystones of the Anacostia trails where still-missing connections to Greenbelt National Park and Old Greenbelt could be made.

Bike tourism is one facet of a Healthy Eating/ Active Living (HEAL) initiative, sponsored by the D.C. Institute for Public Health Innovation that promotes healthy lifestyles in municipalities of the Mid Atlantic region. The Cities of Frederick and Cumberland have invested heavily in the C&O bike trail and have seen a big increase in tourism revenue. ATHA plans to partner with other municipalities in Northern Prince George's to further improve bicycle infrastructure with security lighting, call boxes and signage to increase usage.

In response to Mayor Calvo, Mr. Marcavitch said that a local bike share station scheduled to open this summer has been put on hold because the company that owns the bicycles has gone bankrupt. However, new stations will open as soon as a new manufacturer has been located and bikes are delivered. A bike share station usually has 10-20 bikes, costs around \$50,000 to set up and needs to be part of a larger group of stations to function.

### 3. MINUTES

Clerk Harper read a summary of the May 14 Town meeting minutes. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by MPT Kulpa-Eddy, the minutes were approved 5 to 0.

### 4. TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer Lape gave the Treasurer's report for the month of May.

### 5. MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor Calvo reported that the last month has probably been the busiest month in his tenure. Many important issues are confronting this Council, with top billing going to hiring a new Code supervisor position and Town Administrator. Tomorrow, the Council will meet in executive session to interview the top candidate for the position after having sifted through more than 2 dozen applications. It is hoped that the Town will have someone in place by July. The search for a new Town Administrator will officially start with the posting of a position description at the consultant's website by the end of this week. It is hoped that, by the end of July, a short list of candidates will have been identified and by August interviews with finalists can be conducted.

Mayor Calvo further reported that he also had a chance to get to know the internal operations of the Code Department. He rode along on a code patrol accompanied an officer on a rental inspection. He learned that there are about 37 vacant properties in Town, which pose a special challenge to the Code Department as well as 2 properties that have been declared unfit for human habitation. The Council recently discussed the process for condemning these properties and having them demolished. To accelerate the process, the Town may decide to front the money which will be recouped when these properties are sold and liens paid off. His statement to the Code Department has led him to the conclusion that a disproportionate share of its workload is caused by a small group of repeat offenders. He intends to ask the Council to revise the regulations for dealing with repeat offenses in order to streamline the process.

In other news, the Council will hold an executive session at the next worksession to interview the current acting Public Works director for the permanent position, effective July 1. At the recent MML conference, he had the honor to be elected Vice President of the Prince George's County Municipal Association (PGCI) a runoff election against the Mayor of Seat Pleasant. He also met with County Executive Baker to discuss County agencies the Town has found difficult to deal with such as DPJE and the non-emergency communications system. He also talked with the Town's auditor and engineering firm, and attended workshops on Maryland economic outlook, the HEAL program and Sustainable Maryland. The Town's sustainable Maryland application has been submitted and the certification is imminent. Finally, Mayor Calvo announced that he has appointed CM Rasmussen as head of the Code Department and CM Schreiber as head of the Public Works Department.

## 6. DEPARTMENT REPORTS

**Administration:** MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported that the Administration Department has been preoccupied with finalizing the FY 2014 Budget Amendments that were adopted tonight and with coordinating the Town's response to the flash flood. At the MML conference, she took training relevant to Town administration, including election issues and emergency management. She was surprised to learn that other small towns also have trouble with getting residents to run for Town Council. Useful information was exchanged on how to increase citizen involvement.

Further, MPT Kulpa-Eddy attended County Councilmember Olson's recent community meeting. She found out that the County offers up to \$10,000 in matching grant for tree planting the Town may want to apply for. Lastly, she attended a Planning Department listening session about a planned rewrite of the Prince George's County zoning ordinance. The existing ordinance is outdated and full of exceptions and not very user friendly. The next step is the discussion of a road map for the amendment process, which she intends to stay informed about.

**Code Compliance:** CM Rasmussen reported that he looks forward to heading the Code Department and meeting with the new Code supervisor. His first job at college was as a college student housing administrator, where he became familiar with the challenge of enforcing community standards and balancing the needs of the community with the rights and interests of individual home owners. He noted that he and his partner own 3 rental units in Berwyn Heights. He intends to be open to any matter that affects his properties to avoid any potential conflicts of interest. When his rental property is inspected, he will ask another Councilmember to be present to ensure impartiality, and offer to recuse himself from any decisions that would have a financial impact on his rental property.

CM Rasmussen reported at the MML conference he took training in the fundamentals of municipal government, such as municipal budgeting, elections and legal issues. He also had the opportunity to network with many elected officials from neighboring cities and towns, which will be important in working collaboratively with them. Highlights for him were the gubernatorial candidates forum, and the keynote address by Cal Ripken.

Lastly, CM Rasmussen recognized the UMD Women's LaCrosse team for winning the national championship and men's baseball team which advanced to regional and the University itself for becoming a member of the Big Ten. He related that he attended a moving Memorial Day celebration at the Phillips-Kleiner Veterans Foreign Wars post in College Park and hopes that Berwyn Heights might participate in such a ceremony in the future.

**Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs:** CM Dennison reported that she attended a number of classes at the MML conference including preventing world violence, the future of police leadership, municipal elections issues, the limits of code enforcement and emergency management. She announced that the May primaries will be held on June 24, with early voting beginning tomorrow.

**Public Health and Safety:** Mayor Calvo noted that the Police Department had an active month and congratulated Chief Antolik for the conviction of the perpetrator of the 2012 domestic violence homicide in Berwyn Heights. Chief Antolik said that he arrived back in Town from vacation in time to deal with the flash flood aftermath. The police were very busy and helped set up 3 command posts to deal with the emergency. The situation was worst on 59th Avenue, where the fire department pulled a resident from a flooded basement. The intersection in front of the Town office was also under water and the police had trouble driving through it, even their SUV. Emergency centers were opened at the Senior Center and the Community Center, and buses were made ready for transport. The police were grateful assisted by the Berwyn Heights Volunteer Fire Department, University of Maryland police, Prince George's County's Homeland Security and Social Security Departments, the Red Cross and the Neighborhood Watch/ Emergency Preparedness Committee.

In the police activities report for May, Chief Antolik reported that there were 4 Part I offenses, one less than the 5 year average of 5.6. The year to date total was also lower than the 5 year average of 32.8. The police issued 228 State and Town citations and 288 speed camera citations.

**Public Works:** CM Schreiber said that he hasn't had a chance to meet with the staff of the Public Works Department yet, but knows from his experience as a resident that trash collection works very well. At the MML conference, he particularly enjoyed meeting other elected officials who supervise Public Works Departments. He is looking forward to use what he learned in his tenure and to meet Acting Director Lockley and his staff.

## 7. COMMITTEE REPORTS

**Green Team:** Reported under Department Reports.

**Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness:** Mike Attick announced that the next meeting will be held on July 2, followed by National Night Out on August 28, a free CPR class will be held. Anyone wishing to participate should contact the Town office.

Mr. Attick commented on the flash flood. He said he was impressed with the County's response, but more so with the Town's. The police coordinated with Berwyn Heights NW/EP and the County agencies and did a professional job. However, many homes along Edmonston Road were tagged with caution tape although they did not have any flooding problems. He believes this may have been done by members of an outside fire department that came to help. Other than that, things worked out well.

**Recreation Council:** CM Dennison noted that the Town-wide yard sale will be held on June 21.

## 8. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

**Ordinance No 164 - 2nd Reading & Adoption of FY 2014 Budget Amendments:** Clerk Harper read the adopting language of the Ordinance. MPT Kulpa-Eddy reported to adopt it. CM Dennison seconded. Mayor Calvo explained that this year's amendments are relatively simple. They declare some new revenue, e.g. the Pop's grant and insurance recovery for a damaged police car, additional expenditures for a community garden, and the distribution of merit increases to the department. The Ordinance was adopted in a 5 to 0 vote.

## 9. NEW BUSINESS

**Resolution 05-2014 - MOU regarding MEA EmPOWER and Community Legacy Grants:** Clerk Harper read a summary of the Resolution. MPT Kulpa-Eddy moved to adopt it. CM Rasmussen seconded. Mayor Calvo explained that this MOU designates the Town of Bladensburg as the administrator of energy efficiency grants it has together and submitted. The MOU provides for the Berwyn Heights to piggyback onto the hard work Bladensburg has done and receive a share of the energy efficiency assistance funds obtained. The Council voted 5 to 0 to adopt the Resolution.

**Resolution 06-2014 - Increase of Pontiac Street School Zone Speed Limit:** Clerk Harper read the Resolution. CM Dennison moved to adopt it. CM Rasmussen seconded. Mayor Calvo said that the Maryland Legislature this year made a number of changes to the speed camera law that the Town must implement. It requires restructuring of the contracts towns have with the speed camera vendors, and raises the minimum speed limit from 15 mph to 20 mph in school zones. This means speed camera tickets cannot be issued unless a car exceeds 32 mph. The Town is hereby implementing the speed limit changes and will soon post new signage in order to be able to continue to operate the cameras.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said that she was concerned about raising the speed limit in school zones, which would make them less safe for students. However, she noticed this Resolution includes a lowering of the speed limit in the 8700 and 8800 block of Edmonston Road from 25 mph to 20 mph, which should help pedestrians using the road. CM Dennison said she would have liked to keep the lower speed limit. But she hopes that students might be trained to stay on the sidewalks to keep themselves safe in the future.

In response to CM Schreiber, Mayor Calvo clarified that the location and times for school zones remain the same; only the speed limit changes. CM Rasmussen said that the police could work with students on how to be safe walking to school and to increase police presence around the schools to monitor traffic. He also said there might be any kind of analysis of how the Town budget might be affected by the likely reduction in revenues from this source. Mayor Calvo said that the budgetary impact will not be known until after the next school year starts. The speed camera is not in operation when school is not in session. However, most

revenue comes from the camera on Greenbelt Road, where the speed limit remains the same. Further, additional revenue might come in from ticketing on Edmore Road, where the speed limit was lowered.

In response to Mr. Attick and Ms. Hayden, Mayor Calvo explained, when school is not in session, the speed limit is 25 mph. While the cameras continue to operate, police evaluates the data and decides whether a ticket is issued and they take school hours and holidays into account. The Council voted 5 to 0 to pass the Resolution.

#### 9. CITIZENS DISCUSSION

New Carrollton Councilmember Jim Wildoner introduced himself as a candidate for the County Council in District 3. He said he is running because of the irresponsibility of this County Council, which is now running a structural deficit of \$110 million. He attended a recent budget hearing and learned how the County is trying to lower the deficit. One measure proposed is a reduction in the tax differential for municipalities. While attending Council meetings, he managed to convince the Council to keep the New Carrollton Metro station in District 3 instead of moving it to District 4, as was planned. Mr. Wildoner said he has 11 years experience serving his community as a councilmember, and more than 30 years experience working with volunteer and non-profit organizations. Those interested to learn more about his positions can visit his website at [www.democracy.com](http://www.democracy.com).

Mike Attick, 62nd Avenue, asked if the code supervisor and town administrator positions were advertised in the Bulletin. Mayor Calvo replied that the administrator position has not yet been advertised. The code supervisor position was advertised on the website. The search was handled by a consultant who was advertised in other publications.

Joan Hayden, Seminole Street, wondered if the community garden may have caused new runoff, and contributed to the flooding problem on 59th Avenue. She asked whether a study was done to determine the garden's potential impacts. Mayor Calvo replied that the main problem on 59th Avenue is the storm drain at the intersection point of the street. This storm drain has backed up before, but this time there was too much water in a short period and the water level rose much higher faster. The Green Team did extensive studies of the environmental impacts of the community garden before it was installed.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:25 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk*

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